

NETCOM's finest push, surpass limits



Competitors plot points on a map just prior to leaving out to find those points during the urban orienteering event.



Sgt. Lisa Morales, NETCOM's 2008 Noncommissioned Officer of the Year, receives congratulations from well-wishers after the June 20 ceremony in the Greely Hall Auditorium.

Soldiers, NCOs take challenge to move them to the next level of competition

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FORT HUACHUCA, Ariz. (NETCOM/9th SC (A)) – Proud and very relieved.

That is how Sgt. Lisa Morales and Pfc. Robert Edwards Jr., describe their feelings once they were officially proclaimed as the 2008 U.S. Army Network Enterprise Technology Command/9th Signal Command Noncommissioned Officer and Soldier of the Year, respectively. The announcement came at a ceremony June 20, in Greely Hall that recognized all the competitors after a week-long competition that tested their Soldier skills, and physical and mental endurance.

Morales, representing the 335th Signal Command (Theater), is a Command Post Node Team Chief assigned to Company B, 40th Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 11th Signal Brigade, Fort Huachuca, Ariz., currently deployed to Camp Arifjan, Kuwait, and attached to the 160th Signal Brigade.

Edwards, representing the 5th Signal Command, is a Network Administrator assigned to Company A, 72nd Expeditionary Signal Battalion, 7th Signal Brigade, in Mannheim, Germany.

All the competitors started off with the Army Physical Fitness Test early June 16. Many of the competitors agree that the altitude, lack of air and humidity were contributing factors to a tougher-than-usual test. It was also the first sign for the competitors that Morales would be a force to be reckoned with; she scored 321 points on the extended scale. A written test on military subjects and an essay on safety rounded out the day.



Sgt. Joanna Yanz, representing the 35th Signal Brigade, receives instructions prior to disassembling an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon, part of the Mystery Task.

Day Two of the competition focused on map reading, plotting points on a map, using a Precision Lightweight GPS (Global Positioning System) Receiver (commonly referred to as a "Plugger"), and finding the points they plotted by running around post. This was a daytime and nighttime event. In between, the competitors had to zero and qualify on the range with no assistance other than taking tower commands.

The third day was the most intense and physically demanding, with all competitors striving to complete numerous Warrior Tasks, and a mystery task. Competitors were tested in chemical/biological tasks, radio operations, live fire target engagement, first aid, carrying a 150-pound casualty, and calling in for medical evacuation extraction – without a break in between. The mystery task started off with disassembling an M249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW), reacting to direct fire while assembling the SAW, performing a function check on the weapon, charging the "enemy" position, and searching a prisoner.

It was a challenge that many of the competitors shook their heads at. "To me, the biggest challenge was the unknown," said Sgt. Thomas Greene, from Woodbourne, N.Y., representing the 1st Signal Brigade, Republic of Korea. "You know what the task is, but you don't know under what conditions... you can't predict that."

The final day of the competition was facing the board of sergeants major, starting early in the morning. Edwards was the first one in to face the board, and upon his departure, the sergeants major were worried.

"This is the first person," said Command Sgt. Maj. Gerald Capps, 311th Signal Command (Theater). "And if the others are anything like

him, it is going to be really hard to determine a winner."

The board process ended around lunch time, giving the competitors some time to reflect on the competition.

"I'm feeling great," said Spc. Rafael Lopez, representing the 35th Signal Brigade. "Even if I don't win, I still feel like I accomplished something."

"I'm relieved and glad that it's over," said Sgt. Joanna Yanz, representing

the 35th Signal Brigade, Fort Gordon, Ga. (Yanz is assigned to Headquarters Company, NETCOM/9th SC (A); with the 11th Signal Brigade deployed to Southwest Asia, the 35th assumed administrative responsibilities of the company.) "It was a really, really good challenge... everything. The best part of the competition was being physically challenged, because it was physically challenging."

When the winners were announced the following day, both winners were stunned.

"It's a humbling experience; probably the most humbling point in my career" Edwards said. "I have a lot of respect for the Soldiers I competed with."

"My heart was beating so fast," Morales said. "Then I breathed a huge sigh of relief. It was amazing."

Both Soldiers will represent NETCOM/9th SC (A) at the U.S. Army Forces Command competition at Fort Bragg, N.C., at the end of July.

"I'm going to totally dedicate myself to the competition, because the most dedicated will win it – and I'm the most dedicated," Morales said. "I'm going to win it."



Pfc. Robert Edwards Jr., NETCOM's 2008 Soldier of the Year, is rodded onto the zero range June 17.



Sgt. Ruth Almeida, representing 311th Signal Command (Theater), knocks out push-ups during the Army Physical Fitness Test on the first day of the competition.